UCU Strike

Labour History: The World's First Strike?

Victory on the Docks

BLACK STAR

CLASS WARFARE ON THE STREETS OF

CÁDIZ

From the 16th to 24th November 22,000 striking metalworkers in Cádiz took action that inspired workers across the Spanish state and beyond. Facing casualisation, crippling inflation, hazardous working conditions and the threatened closure of another plant (Airbus) the workers halted production, occupied the Puerto Real industrial area, erected barricades and brought industry to a standstill.

A strike, which had been forced on the reluctant leadership of the CCOO and UGT Trade Unions, developed into open rebellion against austerity capitalism and the 'leftwing' PSOE-Podemos coalition government. While the workers controlled the streets, the government and Trade Union bureaucracy conspired to crush them. The latest great 'leftwing' illusion - Podemos - was an integral part of the government that mobilised squads of anti-riot National Police alongside the paramilitary Guardia Civil. A 15-ton Guardia Civil armoured vehicle was deployed to further terrorise working-class neighbourhoods, while solidarity protests in Madrid were banned.

Teargas, truncheons and rubber bullets rained down on the strikers while their Union 'leaders' negotiated their betrayal.

Amid claims of 'irregularity' in the conduct of the ballot from many of the workers, the CCOO and UGT leaderships announced the strike over on 25th November. Both unions were widely condemned as traitors of the working class. The deal including a 2% pay increase (in reality a pay cut in the context of 6% inflation), the Airbus closure was agreed without any further protest and the issues around increasing precarity and hazardous conditions were disappeared.

Steelworkers in Cádiz, like workers everywhere, are no strangers to betrayal by the Trades Union leaderships. Anarcho-syndicalists in Spain, in support of the struggle of the workers, point to an alternative without reliance on bought Trade Union leaderships or 'our' would be elected 'representatives' in government. It is an alternative in which workers maintain control of their own struggles, tactics and decision-making directly - through their own Assemblies.

UCU Three Day Strike Across Britain and Northern Ireland

FUCUd?

The recent three-day strike action by UCU, the University and College Lecturers' Union, has seen enthusiastic pickets stand in the freezing cold up and down the country to demand action from the employer on pensions, pay, workloads, casualisation, and pay parity for women, black and ethnic minority members of academic staff and those with disabilities.

Some fifty-eight universities across Britain and Northern Ireland voted for strike action in November and action short of a strike, which began on 1 December with another forty-two UCU branches which didn't meet the required fifty per cent turnout being re-balloted. The organisation of the ballot has continued to prove controversial as the union bosses had the opportunity to hold a general (aggregated), ballot but chose instead to hold a disaggregated one in which each higher education institution has to reach a fifty per cent turnout.

That, in itself, holds the key to this dispute making it clear that the pensions issue still dominates this strike and has done for the past few years. In order to make sure an aggregated ballot on pensions would not fail a number of other issues were 'tacked on' and the decision was made to disaggregate the vote.

Moreover, a lingering sense remains among workers in poorly-paid and precarious employment that they were being pulled into a dispute about pensions which they couldn't afford, and would likely never benefit from. Besides all that, the union leadership have been advising members that the action short of a strike might not actually require… em, action.

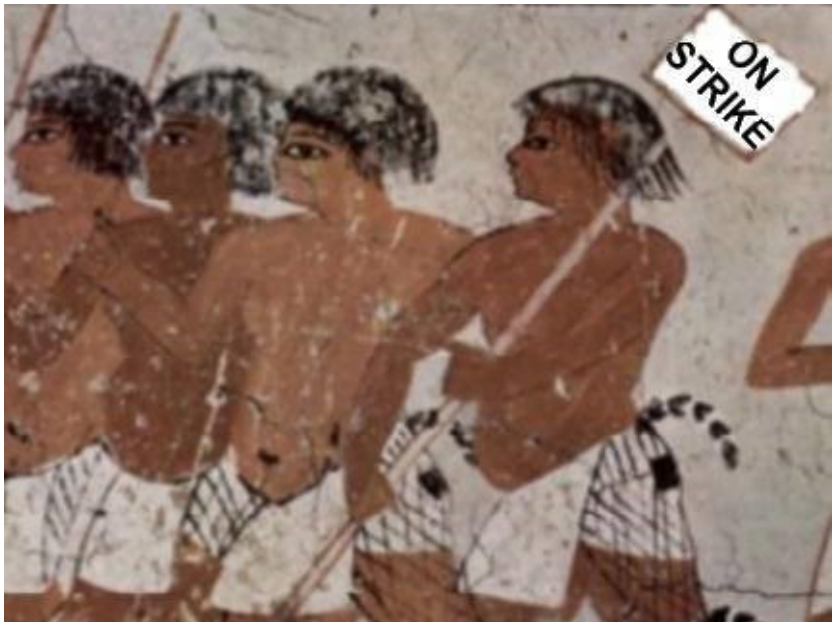
They are suggesting action short of a strike for some things but not everything extra that universities ask workers to do. It seems that the strike itself may not proceed anyway unless a good number of the other universities being re-balloted join the dispute, especially on the USS pensions issue.

Meanwhile, the wealthy pensions are still the tail wagging the dog of the absolute shit-show of a decade and more of privatisation, casualisation and all the inequalities and abuses that has brought to the sector. Not so much of a happy new year in store for higher education workers.

Foyle Port Workers Win Pay Dispute

Workers employed with the Londonderry Harbour and Port Commission and dockers with Burke Shipping Company, all members of Unite, have succeeded in winning a pay dispute with their employers after a couple of successive weeks of strike action. Supported by Derry Trades Council, the action was set to escalate into a full blockade of Foyle Port over the continued pay freeze against a backdrop of continually rising inflation when workers were only asking for 2.1 per cent. Cops were called out by the port authorities on the first day of the strike because some lorries were turning back and refusing to cross the picket lines in solidarity with the strikers. Dock work remains one of the most difficult and dangerous of jobs in spite of improvements to health and safety over the years. In 2015, three Derry dockers were injured in a twenty foot fall into the hold of a ship after a crane collapsed in the port.

'Today' in Labour History:
Demanding Unpaid Wages from Ramses III



Today, or perhaps yesterday or tomorrow, but close enough: the first recorded (on papyrus) strike. Workers in Egypt carrying out public works projects for King Ramses, III downed tools in the Valley of the Kings. They were protesting having gone 20 days without pay - which consisted of portions of grain. The exact date is, of course. Estimated: described as being during "the sixth month of the 29th year" of Ramses' reign which would have been in 1170BC.

Meanwhile from Ballymena...

Back on a wee pre-Christmas visit to the folks news of the demise of the Workers Solidarity Movement was brought to my attention.

As I think I mentioned previously I've been out of touch with developments for some time now. The announcement on Wednesday 8 December brought back memories of encounters with those who went on to form the WSM and with some of its members in the 80s and 90s.

Way back when Organise! (perhaps we were still Antrim and Ballymena Anarchist Group?) were involved in talks on the creation of an Anarchist organisation across Ireland. Our anarcho-syndicalism didn't sit well with the Platformist direction taken by what became the WSM (and visa-versa). One encounter, a few years later, with a 'newer' member of the group popped into my head. I was greeted, outside a meeting in Dublin, with a rather sneery 'ah, you are the anarcho-syndicalist' by a comrade with a copy of Capital sticking out of the top of his pocket.

Despite our differences (and I can't really speak to later developments), the WSM did a lot of serious work supporting workers in struggle and building the profile of anarchism in Ireland (and internationally).

I fondly remember Alan MacSimion (1957 -2018): his wit, strength of character, commitment, and energy in building an anarchism relevant to the lives and struggles of working class people across this island. Alan had parted ways with the organisation he helped to build several years before his own sad and sudden death.

His contribution to building a serious anarchist tradition should inspire those who remain to continue to build and make anarchism relevant to the lives of exploited and oppressed working class people in all their diversity, both north and south and internationally.

Get Involved: Help Build An Anarchist Alternative.

Organise! is an anarchist political group in Ireland who take inspiration from the self directed struggles of working-class people, particularly those organised on anarcho-syndicalist lines. Our history goes back to the original formation of Organise! by the Ballymena and Antrim Anarchist Groups in 1985.

We are a small group of ordinary working class people who are fed up with being fucked about by the profit system, fed up with seeing our communities torn apart by racism, patriarchy, nationalism and sectarianism, and sick of a greedy few getting rich off everyone else's backs.

We are actively working to promote solidarity in opposition to capitalism, the state, patriarchy and all other forms of oppression and hierarchy. The way we organise reflects the free society we want to create: one based on voluntary association, democratic participation and self-management.

Our members are workers, claimants, students, migrants, unemployed and other working-class people committed to building a libertarian communist union movement actively opposed to all forms of oppression and exploitation.

We want to improve everyday conditions for ourselves and other working class people, but we also struggle for the revolutionary transformation that can create a free and equal society, one based on mutual aid and co-operation. Sound crazy? Maybe it does, but in an era in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism the continuation of the present system is even crazier…

The current system isn't working – stress and overwork affect more and more people while others are flung on the dole; for increasing amounts of workers it is precarity, zero hours contracts and the stress of being unable to plan or budget our lives; we live in a world of plentiful resources yet millions starve; some people make vast fortunes just because they own companies, land, property or natural resources, but those of us who create the wealth, work the land and build the properties are left struggling to pay for the natural resources; politicians tell us there's no money – not for wages, benefits or local amenities, but there's always plenty for war; both locally and globally the gap between the richest and the poorest sections of society has never been so great; instead of a war on poverty they've got a war on 'benefit fraud', while the same system that creates war, poverty and environmental destruction stigmatises, imprisons and deports the resultant refugees.

We don't think these things are inevitable or coincidental, we think they are related to capitalism – an economic system defined by wage slavery and the accumulation of profit out of other people's work. So we support all workers against their bosses in demanding higher wages and better conditions. We try to intervene practically to support workers engaged in disputes and are also active in our own workplaces and communities. Not only against exploitation but against the multiple oppressions faced by members of the working class in all our diversity.

But it's not just a question of trying to struggle by in a world of exploitation and oppression; we look to a future where workers control production and society in their own interests. And unlike some people who claim to oppose capitalism, we don't want to be a new set of leaders and we refuse to be led by anyone else. We advocate direct democracy in the workplace and through the commune in our communities – working in federation to ensure that the needs of all are met and that no-one is ever again in a position to oppress or exploit another human being.

If you are interested in these ideas, we'd encourage you to explore the website and consider getting involved.

We currently have members in Belfast, Cork, Derry, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Portadown and are building the organisation on the basis of active involvement and participation. We aren't interested in meaningless 'paper' membership so you can't join by filling in an online form and bunging us a few quid.

To talk to us about joining get the ball rolling, check out our website at https://organiseanarchistsireland.com and send an email to:

organiseasi@gmail.com